



### 2 Peter 1:16-18

Some say that Michael Jordan was the greatest basketball player of all time. I have no desire to prove that or dispute it, but one thing is certain, his high school basketball coach has taken a lot of heat over the years for cutting him from the team. If you follow sports at all, you have probably heard this story, how the great Jordan was cut from his high school team. Jordan himself made this a big part of his life story repeating it again throughout his career. He even told this story when he was inducted into the NBA Hall of Fame. He turned his attention to his high school coach, Pop Herring, who was sitting in the audience and in front of the whole world scolded him saying, “I wanted to make sure you understood: You made a mistake, dude.”<sup>1</sup>

Jordan’s induction speech was hardly the right time to embarrass his high school coach in front of the entire watching world but what makes this story so sad is the fact that it isn’t even true.<sup>2</sup> Jordan was only a sophomore in high school and he expected to make the varsity team but instead his coach picked someone else. He wasn’t *cut* from the varsity team because he was never *on* the varsity team. This story repeated by Jordan is nothing but a well rehearsed myth. And when you tell myths over and over and unless they are challenged and brought to light, they persist and become fact.

In verse sixteen Peter addressed a subject that many were calling a myth. *For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* The book of 2 Peter is a letter about the dangers of false teaching and the predominant theme of these false teachers was their claim that Jesus was not coming again. These false teachers—and we will learn more about them in the coming weeks—were extremely dangerous. Peter devoted all of chapter two to talking about these purveyors of heresy. Here’s a little sample.

<sup>17</sup> *These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them.* <sup>18</sup> *For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. Of*

*them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud.” (2 Peter 2:17-18, 22)*

With our modern sensibilities we might be tempted to come alongside Peter and say, “Pete, buddy, them’s some harsh words there. Did you forget that Jesus said that we are to love our enemies? Don’t you think you should tone it down just a tad? Can’t we all just get along here?” Every once in a while I will call out a false teacher and alert you to something I think is dangerous and lurking around the corner, but I would never feel comfortable telling someone that “blackest darkness is reserved for them.” But we need to trust Peter here—that he truly knew how bad these people were and how much of a threat they were to the faith of believers that Peter was shepherding.

These false teachers were attempting to instill doubt. I have often said that there is such a thing as healthy doubt. Healthy doubt is being faced with tough questions but then working hard to find the answers. Healthy doubt admits that there are some difficult things in the Bible and you either eventually find an acceptable answer or else you realize that you may never be 100% satisfied with that particular question. If you’ve never had instances of healthy doubt in your Christian walk then you probably have your head buried in the sand and eventually you will have a very rude awakening.

There is such a thing as healthy doubt but we should also be on guard against unhealthy doubt and this is what the false teachers were attempting to do. They were trying to cast doubt upon the truthfulness of Peter’s teaching. In other words, they were using Satan’s ancient strategy by asking, “Did God really say?” They called Peter’s teaching about the second coming of Christ a myth. Understand by calling it a myth they were not necessarily calling it a lie.

For example, Jesus miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is often referred to as the miracle of sharing. The story goes like this. Of course Jesus could not have turned two loaves and five fish into enough food to feed ten to twenty thousand people. The little boy who shared his food with the disciples inspired everyone else to share what food they had brought with those around them. The generosity of the little boy in effect created a “miracle of sharing.” I had a pastor in Madison actually tell me this is what he believed. This kind of person would say that the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is a myth.

A slightly less bold kind of doubt comes from Richard Foster, author of the best-selling book, *A Celebration of Discipline*.

I noticed that the focus on the with-God life circumnavigates inconsistencies found in Scripture and differing opinions about theology.

Let me share with you what the Bible is. The Bible is a most reliable guide into this zoe life. You see, the Bible is God’s book; no one owns it, but God. And God has so superintended the writing of Scripture that it serves as a most reliable guide for our own spiritual formation. So you see, the purpose of the Bible is, as a most reliable guide into the zoe life that God intends for you and for me.<sup>3</sup>

There are two problems with his comments. The first is that he matter-of-factly states that there are inconsistencies in the Bible. Notice that he did not say apparent inconsistencies, but just straight up inconsistencies—and that we should just ignore them and not concern ourselves with them.

This must be why he said that the Bible is “a most reliable guide” for life. Notice again that he called it “a” most reliable guide and not even “the” reliable guide. He used this exact phrase three different times in three different sentences so I am not taking him out of context nor is it possible that he merely misspoke.

Compare this with the [doctrinal statement of our church and denomination](#).

We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.

The Bible is not merely a “reliable guide” for our life but rather the “complete revelation of His will and the ultimate authority in our lives.” But this is what happens when a person begins to doubt the reliability of the Scriptures.

But those who doubt its reliability or call it a myth are very clever with their words. Even someone who would hold to the miracle of sharing would still say that the Bible is very beautiful, interesting and helpful. Such people will use the word “myth” when speaking of the Bible. They claim that the Bible is a myth—a legend. It doesn’t matter if the story isn’t true. All that matters is that we can draw a positive principle from it which we can apply to our lives. You end up saying that it is not historically true but it’s still true for me.

Or, like Richard Foster, you admit that there are inconsistencies but you gloss over them and glean the truth from the Bible. Unlike the miracle of sharing people, Foster would most certainly say that most of the Bible is true but we shouldn’t stress over the fact that some if it isn’t true.

Let me ask you a simple question. If some parts of the Bible are not true, how do you know which ones are true? How can one possibly pick out the precise parts which are true and leave the false things behind? The answer is that it is not possible to do so without sitting in judgment of God himself. You may have heard that Thomas Jefferson created his own Bible by literally cutting out the parts he happened to like and pasting them into a book.

You cannot pick and choose the parts of Scripture you like. You cannot say that one part is true but some other parts are not true. The Bible stands or falls as a unit, which is why our church is committed to teaching and preaching the whole counsel of God. This is why our statement of faith declares that the Bible must “be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.” But the doubt that can creep in—and the doubt that the false teachers were attempting to stir up—is the possibility that the Scriptures are not reliable. Peter

flatly denied that he created “cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Furthermore, he gave reasons why the Bible is true, which are still relevant for you and I today. We will look at these over the next few weeks.

The first principle of Biblical reliability is eyewitness testimony. Peter wrote:

*For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.<sup>17</sup> For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,”<sup>18</sup> we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.*

I think we all understand the importance of eyewitness testimony. I can’t help but think about the case of George Zimmerman. Zimmerman’s critics believe that even though the 911 operator told him to stand down, he continued to follow Trayvon Martin and eventually murdered him in cold blood. However, the eyewitness testimony claimed that Martin was on top of Zimmerman pinching him in the face which resulted in a broken nose and cut on his head. But the critics shoot back and ask “Where is the evidence that Zimmerman was attacked?” This past Friday a photo was released that shows a bad cut and lots of blood on the back of Zimmerman’s head. One photo is hardly a trial is it, but it would appear that the eyewitness testimony has so far been corroborated by that photo.

The Bible itself requires eyewitness testimony.

*A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established (Deut. 19:15).*

Jesus used this exact verse in Matthew 18 and applied it to the topic of church discipline.

*If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses (Matt. 18:15-16).*

*If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true (John 5:31-32).*

Eyewitness testimony is critical in establishing the reliability of any truth claim. The Bible sets forth the necessity of eyewitness testimony and it routinely provides its own evidence of eyewitness testimony. Peter claimed that he and other were eyewitnesses of an important event in the life and ministry of Jesus. The event he referred to was the transfiguration of Jesus. This is how Mark described the event.

*After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them.<sup>3</sup> His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.<sup>4</sup> And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. (Mark 9:2-3).*

Peter is very specific in his details. He and the others saw the majesty, glory and honor that the Father bestowed upon the Son. Mark described Jesus' appearance as dazzling white but Peter gave the spiritual meaning behind what they saw. This was the unadulterated majesty of Jesus. This is what Jesus would look like if he had the full glory and honor that he had with the Father for all eternity. Furthermore, Peter reported that he also heard the voice of the Father, as he said, "borne from heaven." They both saw and heard this event.

We know that not only Peter but James and John were eyewitnesses of the transfiguration. We also know that Matthew and Luke recorded the same event. We have two things we need to decide from here. First we need to understand why Peter chose to use the transfiguration as the key event that proves the return of Christ and second, we need to understand how this impacts our overall trust in the reliability of the Bible.

First of all, out of all of the events in Jesus' life, why would Peter have chosen the transfiguration? One could argue that the pinnacle of Jesus' days on earth was his resurrection. That was of infinite importance so why did Peter not use that as evidence? Or he could have related the ascension of Jesus forty days later. Peter was an eyewitness to that even as well and he could have shared what the angel said to all of them.

<sup>10</sup> *They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.* <sup>11</sup> *"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."* (Acts 1:10-11)

You can't get more obvious evidence than that, can you? In this story we have both what Peter saw and what Peter heard and what the angel said related perfectly to the topic at hand—*This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.* But Peter didn't choose the resurrection or ascension as primary proof of Jesus' second coming but instead he chose the transfiguration and I think that he did so because at the transfiguration, Peter saw Jesus as we will all see him when he comes again. In becoming a man, Jesus laid aside his divine right to sit on his throne. In essence, he gave up his full glory as eternal creator and Lord.

But during the few moments when Peter James and John saw the transfigured Christ was the only time Peter had ever seen Jesus in his complete glory. The word translated as transfigured is the word metamorphosis. Some of you will remember that this is the word Paul used in Romans 12:2 when he called us to "be transformed by the renewing of our minds." Obviously, Jesus did not need to be transformed or grow spiritually as we do but on the other hand, his transfiguration was a genuine metamorphosis. Peter saw his full, majestic glory which is what you and I will all see when Christ returns in glory. Therefore, the transfiguration served as proof of Jesus' return.

But the importance of eyewitness testimony goes far beyond this one event because we have eyewitness testimony to everything that Jesus said and did through the four gospels. Matthew was a disciple and an eyewitness. John was a disciple, eyewitness, longest lived and most prolific writer of the twelve disciples. Luke carefully investigated every last detail and wrote an accurate

account. Mark was not an eyewitness nor a disciple but it is widely accepted that Mark was writing on behalf of Peter. Mark got all of his eyewitness evidence from Peter. Furthermore, Mark is the same person called “John” or John Mark” in the gospels who abandoned Paul and Barnabus on their first missionary journey.

But we can add more layers of eyewitnesses upon this foundation.

1 John 1.1 *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.*

1 Cor 15:4-6—*that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.*

Acts 2:32 *God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.*

Luke 1:1-2 *Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.*

We will have to wait until we meet next time to finish this passage in 2 Peter but let me add some information outside of the Scriptures that is very helpful in gaining a full trust in the word of God. An important piece to understand is the reliability of the New Testament compared to other ancient texts.

AUTHOR / TEXT	EXISTING COPIES	YEARS BETWEEN ORIGINAL & EARLIEST SURVIVING COPIES
<b>NEW TESTAMENT</b>	<b>24,000</b>	<b>40-70</b>
HOMER / ILIAD	643	500
SOPHOCLES	193	1400
ARISTOTLE	49	1400
TACITUS	20	1000
CAESAR	10	1000
ARISTOPHANES	10	1200
EURIPIDES	9	1300
SUETONIUS	8	800
DEMOSTHENES	8	800
THUCYDIDES	8	1300
HERODOTUS	8	1300
PLINY	7	750
PLATO	7	1200

In this chart we have a list of ancient texts that were written either before or a little after the writing of the New Testament. No scholar in their right mind has ever doubted the historical reliability or accuracy of these ancient texts. They are accepted as a brute fact—end of story. However, the Bible is continually presented by these same historians not only as myth and legend but also as historically inaccurate. You see the difference, correct? But according to this chart, the New Testament is many times more reliable than the very best of ancient documents.

For example, Homer’s Iliad has 643 existing copies but the NT has over 24,000 existing copies. More importantly, the earliest surviving copy of the Iliad was produced a massive 500 years after the original was written. Don’t you think it is very likely that during those 500 intervening years that many mistakes were inserted into the text? In comparison, the time between the

original writing and our existing copies of the NT is a mere 40-70 years.

We are just scratching the surface of the full reliability and authority of the Bible. In two weeks we will finish this important topic. But to close, let’s see the application that Peter wants us to see.

<sup>19</sup> *And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.*

The Bible is completely trustworthy and we would *do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place*. Without the Scripture, we are merely fumbling around in the dark. Once again, our doctrinal statement is instructive. The Scriptures are

- to be believed in all that it teaches
- obeyed in all that it requires
- and trusted in all that it promises.

I challenge you keep these three phrases handy this week and approach the Bible with them in mind. Maybe you have struggled to believe a certain doctrine. Some of you have turned away from obeying something that you know is true. Still others have been tempted to distrust one of God's promises. Our life and hope are dependent upon the historical reliability and ultimate authority of God's word.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://sports.yahoo.com/nba/news?slug=aw-jordanhall091209>

<sup>2</sup> <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1193740/index.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://apprising.org/2012/04/18/richard-foster-says-bible-reliable-guide-despite-inconsistencies/>